

Bowditch (H. J.)





## YELLOW FEVER EPIDEMIC.

### What Should Be Done?—Imperative Need of a National Sanitary Board.

To the Editor of the Post:

Sir—Many years ago, when the city of Memphis was stricken with a fearful epidemic of yellow fever and the disease threatened all the States adjacent, if not the whole country, a national board of health, with full power and an ample supply of money from the United States Treasury, met the emergency vigorously and for the time being virtually held the city, and, surrounding it by proper sanitary laws, squelched the disease on the spot where it first showed itself in all its epidemic virulence. Having done this, Dr. J. S. Billings, the board's efficient agent, taught the people of Memphis how to purify themselves of the filth in which they had previously lived, all unconscious of the peril that springs from any unsanitary conditions, wherever existing.

To do all this the board needed and apparently possessed the full confidence of the nation at large, and could draw largely from funds voted by Congress. It is greatly to be regretted that this harmonious coöperation between the board and Congress and the President was, under the fatal influences of politics, lost. The board, deprived of its funds, which were given into the hands of the United States Hospital Marine Corps, had subsequently to its great work on the Mississippi to resign its beneficent operations, and has been in obscurity since. Its members could not be dishonored, for they were honorable and able men. But they were virtually crushed, and all power was transferred to a body of men, most of them unknown assanitarians. It was, as I think unwisely, argued that these gentlemen, surgeons of all the marine hospitals throughout the country, were a body fitted to cope with an outbreak of a terrible epidemic. To my mind such a proposition seemed wholly a mistaken one. How could a body separated as the corps is into isolated positions throughout our immense domain, and with no special sanitary experience or tendencies, hope to equal in efficiency a body of experts in sanitary science, meeting in conclave at Washington, and with eyes always open to such emergencies, able to act at once.

The bare statement of the difference between the two bodies must, I think, strike any unprejudiced mind of the real misfortune that befell the country when the change was made. And what made the matter seem worse to my

mind was the rumor that the chief of the marine hospital service had stated that he should not do anything in regard to malignant diseases appearing in any part of the country until he was officially informed by the executive of the State in which such disease existed that it was in an epidemic form, and therefore called for the national succor. To wait for such appeal would inevitably always be too late for really efficient service.

A national sanitary board is established, or ought to be established, for the very purpose of preventing, if possible, the smallest sign of an epidemic. It would do this by summarily establishing sanitary rules of quarantine, by disinfection of the locality and any other proper means. But what has been the fact in regard to this epidemic of yellow fever at Jacksonville? It has apparently been allowed to spread; or at least it has spread until it is seemingly beyond control. The recent sudden and melancholy death of Professor Proctor in New York is a ghastly warning to all of us. No one can foretell where the disease may hereafter show itself, for refugees from Florida may be in various parts of the country.

It becomes, therefore, the duty of every man and woman in the land to urge Congress to re-establish the national board of health, or at least to give us some national sanitary board whose sole duty shall be to watch over the health of our people and to crush out immediately and with an unsparing hand even a spark of malignant disease as soon as it shows itself. Let no epidemics be allowed to go unchecked.

God grant that the national board of health have a new birth, and with greater powers, if need be, in the same manner as that by which our Massachusetts State board of health was regenerated after having fallen by the influence of political partisanship into hopeless imbecility and almost total disregard of sanitary work! As the Massachusetts board stands now vastly higher and has more power for good over our State than ever before, so let us hope for this nation. To gain this object the People must demand of Congress the establishment of some national sanitary authority with the fullest powers to act promptly and efficiently. Let us all take hold and help in this great cause. Every citizen should see to it that his Representative and Senators in Congress are appealed to on this grave matter.

Meanwhile let us send ample help to our suffering fellow-citizens in Jacksonville. I see that our efficient Mayor of Boston has established a bureau of relief at the City Hall. Let everybody send of his or her small or ample means, and thereby do a share towards the alleviation of the sufferings of the inhabitants of Jacksonville. I remain yours faithfully,

HENRY I. BOWDITCH.

Boston, Sept. 14, 1888.



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